

ORSETT BRIEFING PAPERS FOR PSYCHOLOGISTS

No.6 - Post-modernity and Globalisation

POST-MODERNITY

Post-modernity exists in the context of modernity, which is also open to debate. There are traditionally four characteristics of modernity that can be highlighted as faith in:

- a) progress;
- b) science to solve problems;
- c) the rational;
- d) the perfection of humanity.

Post-modernity challenges a number of other characteristics of modernity ¹:

- i) the existence of a stable, coherent self;
- ii) reason and "science" as providing an objective, reliable, and universal foundation of knowledge;
- iii) that such knowledge is "True" ie something real and unchanging (universal) about the structure of the world;
- iv) reason exists independent of the self;
- v) "science" as the "exemplar of the right use of reason";
- vi) language as a medium of representation.

Post-modernity is a commonly used term today, but it is an "amorphous thing":

The term itself hovers uncertainly in most current writings between - on the one hand - extremely complex and difficult philosophical senses, and - on the other - an extremely simplistic mediation as a nihilistic, cynical tendency in contemporary culture ².

¹ Flax, J (1987) Postmodernism and gender relations in feminist theory, Signs, 12/4, 621-643.

² Docherty, T (1993) Postmodernism: an introduction. In Docherty, T (ed) Postmodernism: A Reader, New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf p1.

There are a number of themes of post-modernity:

i) Foundationlessness - there are no universals; "no sure epistemological foundation upon which knowledge can be built" ³.

ii) Fragmentariness - reality is "a disunited, fragmented accumulation of disparate elements and events" ⁴.

iii) Constructivism - there is no world "out there" to discover, all knowledge is constructed; "human experience consists of meaningful interpretations of the real" ⁵.

iv) Neopragmatism - the criteria for understanding are not whether knowledge corresponds to reality, because this cannot be known in the post-modernity. Rather it is whether knowledge "functions successfully in guiding human action to fulfil intended purposes" ⁶.

Globalisation

Globalisation technically is an economic term which describes changes to a world economy dominated by multi-nationals, and the liberalisation of free trade. However, in practice, globalisation is used to mean social changes as well. Again it is a term for which there is not always agreement about its meaning.

Here are a list of some of the main characteristics noted for globalisation:

- Control by rich countries of access to the natural resources of the poorer countries;
- Monopoly position of companies from rich countries (ie multi-nationals);
- Selective labour migration towards richer countries;
- Multi-nationals beyond individual state control;
- Greater awareness of these phenomena through the growth of media;
- Changes in world inequality in wealth (either getting better or worse depending who you read).

³ Polkinghorne, D.E (1992) Postmodern epistemology of practice. In Kvale, S (ed) Psychology and Postmodernism, London: Sage p149.

⁴ Ibid p149.

⁵ Ibid p150.

⁶ Ibid p151.

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